

Three Fragments from a Biopolitical History of Animals: Questions of Body, Soul, and the Body Politic in Homer, Plato, and Aristotle

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The civil political sphere – that space where human public politics occurs, where ‘the political is declared,’ often through government, representation, measured participation and the ballot - has inherent limitations that frustrate the project of ending violence towards animals. Animals are “by nature” always, at best, secondary entities, not due the political agency that is naturally bestowed upon humans. In this way a perceived fundamental differentiation undermines any claim for equivalent political agency between human and non human, and assures that animals, even if granted consideration, will always be owed a lesser degree of responsibility.

These limitations very clearly underpin animal welfare approaches, which seek to minimise animal suffering without necessarily changing the frameworks of violence and power that perpetuate this suffering. For example, the notion that slaughter houses are tolerable once perceived pain is eliminated.

Animal rights approaches often fare better in this regard by seeking to demonstrate the existence of unjustifiable speciesism in order to guarantee equal protections. One of their principle arguments is that the life that is held by both non human and human animals alike has an intrinsic value. Yet rights approaches themselves face constraints that reproduce the same fundamental differentiation – the gap – between human and non human. For instance, in the “life boat case,” Tom Regan stops short of agreeing that the death of an animal would constitute the same harm as the death of a human (2004: 324).

Recent work by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (see 1998, 1999 and 2004) provides an opportunity to consider the place of animals within politics from a different standpoint than other approaches, such as animal rights or animal welfare interventions. Agamben’s focus on the concept of *biopolitics*, his attention to the relationship of politics to violence and to legitimation and the relation between the human and the non human, make his work worthy of analysis by those interested in the violence perpetrated by humans against non human animal life, even if Agamben’s own conclusions are themselves not aimed at finding solutions to these problems (see Wadiwel, 2003). While this approach differs from animal rights or welfare strategies in that it focuses concern on the nature and meaning of politics itself and its relationship to animality (Agamben understands the political sphere as a space that aims to exclude animal life as its primary activity), this approach does not seek to promote action within the terms of the civil political space. Rather it challenges the very boundaries of this space itself. Thus, although Agamben is no champion of animal rights or welfare, his philosophy offers a different way to conceptualise “the problem of the animal.”

The term “biopolitics” is taken from Michel Foucault’s description of the contemporary focus of power towards biological *life*, its vicissitudes, its requirements, and its essence. An example of the effect of biopower within contemporary

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government is the focus upon meeting the broad biological needs of human populations: today government concerns itself with the deployment of resources for education and training, public health, the facilitation of relationships and organisations, fertility and “family” planning, the management of the economy, and the generalised financial well being of populations.

Where Foucault treats biopolitics as a relatively *modern* form of rationality, tied closely with the emergence of government and the disciplines, Agamben suggests that the connection between biopower and the political space is much more significant and enduring. According to Agamben, biological life is given both place and meaning within the domain of sovereignty through its position of vulnerability in relation to sovereign power. Following Walter Benjamin, Agamben defines the life constituted by exception as “bare life,” which he identifies as the “bearer of the link between life and law” (1998: 65). Bare life represents life contained within the “zone of indistinction” or the sovereign ban, a life which is neither constituted by law, nor by divine justice, where it is licit for sovereign power to “*kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice*” (83). It is for this reason that Agamben insists in his definition of ‘bare life,’ that sovereignty constitutes life within the context of a power over life and death: in Agamben’s words “human life is included in the political order in being exposed to an unconditional capacity to be killed” (85). Biopolitical rationales become inseparable from the exceptional character of sovereign power, since the constitution of the political sphere itself necessarily entails the constitution of life (181). Thus, in so far as political sovereignty in the Western tradition defines itself through the capture of biological life, it is biopolitical in origin.

Further, Agamben suggests that this view of political sovereignty assists to resolve the apparent tension between Foucault’s two apparently divergent foci of study: namely, “*political techniques*” associated with the State and government and “*technologies of the self*” relating to the disciplines and individuated power (5). In Agamben’s insistence that biopolitics is synonymous with the whole history of politics in the West, he identifies a process that unites the activity of state sovereignty with the evolution of individuated forms of biological control. Agamben remarks: “*It can be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power. In this sense, biopolitics is at least as old as the sovereign exception*” (6).

Not only does Agamben identify closely the relation between biology and the political sphere, but he also identifies this process as constitutive of the human / animal divide. In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Agamben states: “In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man. That is to say, in its origin Western politics is also biopolitics.” (Agamben, 2004: 80). I should be clear here that is not controversial in itself that Agamben should consider animal life within his understanding of biopolitics. After all, Foucault himself was aware of the long philosophical connection between human life and that of animals that gave shape to biopower: thus Foucault states “modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (Foucault, 1998: 143). But what is interesting in relation to Agamben’s understanding is that the contestation between human and animal should figure as defining of biopolitics itself, rather than a mere feature. Biopower (or politics in the West) is, before any thing else, a question of determining the distinction between human and animal.

What interests me in Agamben's pronouncements— if we hold them as true - is the possibility not merely of telling a history of biopolitics as the history of politics in the West, but tracing the genealogy of the relationship between the human, the animal and thus the biopolitical. There is an opportunity to revisit the “primal” scenes of Western public politics in order to draw attention to the curious recurrence of the animal within the development of the human political subject, and highlighting the fact that this subject is mapped by threshold points which although operate to formally exclude animal life, also intersect, and are grounded in, the animal. It is after all no coincidence, as I shall discuss, that Aristotle describes “man” as the *political animal*; that entity that finds its home within the *polis*; an animal that is at once an animal, yet is also beyond other animals due to its natural residence within political community. This construction of the human political subject illustrates the necessary biopolitical connection of the human to its animal bare existence – its biological soul if you like – that speaks and yet does not speak at the same time as the fully formed human subject. The animal arrives as a necessary burden to the human political subject, the connection to biological life it cannot seem to shake, and in many respects, the destiny that it inescapably returns to.

Below, I provide three fragments on the animal from the classical age. These fragments are not intended to provide definitive statements on the positions of these thinkers on animals. Rather they intend to highlight the curious positioning of the animal with respect to the human, and the implication of this co-department for politics in the Western tradition. Thus, the fragments I look at are in many respects taken for what they are; the question I pose throughout is why they are positioned in the way that they are, and in what way do they illustrate something about the intersection of animal and human life, and its relationship to politics.¹ These intertwinings are significant, as they indicate the historical existence of an active process of dividing between the human and the animal, a process that simultaneously defines the frontiers of the civil political space. And the flow on from this intersection, as I shall discuss in the conclusion to this paper, are the inherent limitation of engaging with the civil political space when this same sphere maintains as a principle of its operation a primary exclusion of non human animal life.

Homer and the Human “Shades”

For those interested in exploring the relationship of animals to humans, Homer's *The Odyssey* contains many rich images that map the connection of animals, humans and gods within a matrix that is, I imagine, difficult to comprehend fully today, though it beckons careful analysis. I do not mean to suggest that non human animals are treated charitably in the work. The blood of non human animals is everywhere in *The Odyssey*; in particular the reader must wade through the many animal sacrifices described at almost every second page within the work. Perhaps the most vivid description provided of this violence is a mass slaughter organised by King Nestor to the God Poseidon: “bulls and rams by the hundred” are sacrificed (Homer, 1997: 78 [Book 1, 30]).

Yet more interesting for our consideration here are the strange tales in which the borders of human life are challenged by non-human animal life. An example of this is

the account of the transformation of the crew of Odysseus's ship into pigs by the Goddess Circe:

... she struck with her wand , drove them into her pigsties,
all of them bristling into swine – with grunts,
snouts – even their bodies,
yes and only
the men's minds stayed steadfast as before. (Homer, 1997:
237-8, [Book 10, 260]).

In so far as it illustrates awareness by the author of the potential elasticity of the borders between human and animal, this incident is certainly curious, and suggests that Homer was aware of a certain unspeakable relationship between human and animal life at its core.

Indeed another fragment on which I wish to focus similarly illustrates a borderland between human and animal life. Odysseus, the hero of the epic poem, sails to the house of the dead – the underworld – to speak to the spirit of the prophet Tiresias. Here Odysseus encounters the spirits of the dead, who have been stripped from their previously living bodies:

... this is just the way of mortals when we die.
Sinews no longer bind the flesh and bones together-
The fire in all its fury burns the body down to ashes
Once life slips from the white bones, and the spirit,
Rustling, flitters away...flown like a dream. (Homer, 1997:
256, [Book 11, 250])

These entities inhabit a bodiless presence, a waking dream. The “shades” are also distinctly *speechless* – they no longer carry the ability for intelligible speech, and are unable ordinarily to articulate themselves.

In order to allow the disembodied souls to speak, Odysseus must follow a procedure described to him by the Goddess Circe before he left her island. He digs a trench in the ground. He pours milk, honey, mellow wine, water and barley around on the ground. After he has prepared his trench, he sacrifices a ram and a black ewe:

I took the victims, over the trench; I cut their throats
And the dark blood flowed in – and up out
of Erubus they came,
Flocking toward me now, the ghosts of the
dead and gone...
Brides and unwed youths and old men who
had suffered much
And girls with their tender hearts freshly scarred by sorrow
And great armies of battle dead, stabbed by bronze spears,
Men of war still wrapped in bloody armor – thousands
Swarming around the trench from every side –
unearthly cries – blanching terror gripped me! (Homer,
1997: 250 [Book 11, 30-50])

The blood provides – as per the best vampiric tradition - what the animation that the spirits of the dead do not otherwise possess. But more important, is the fact that the blood in this story not only gives temporary life to the dead, but enables the spirits to speak--indeed, to speak the ‘truth’. (Homer, 1997: 252 [Book 11, 100]). And it is not merely the seer Tiresias who is granted this revived ability through imbibing the animal blood, but all the spirits who kneel at the trench and quench their thirst:

She knew me at once and wailed out in grief
And her words came winging toward me, flying home.
(Homer, 1997: 254 [Book 11, 170])

Thus, for the remainder of the chapter, Odysseus, standing with his sword drawn at the trench, allows spirit after spirit to drink from the blood and tell them his story. In the words of Tiresias – “Drink the blood and tell you the truth.” (Homer, 1997: 252 [Book 11, 100]).

The ability to use language to speak the ‘truth’ is one of the conventional traits associated by philosophers with the human, that essential element that it is assumed floats above the mere biological body. Yet what this scene illustrates, at least in Homer’s world, is that the ability to speak the truth, to enact what is distinctly human about the human animal, is also reliant on the animal within. It is the biological body that provides the engine for that quality that marks the human as having something beyond the mere biological.

Moreover, what is fascinating about Odysseus’ journey to the underworld is that the spirits operate as an inversion of Agamben’s concept of “bare life.” In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben discusses in detail the *Muselmänner* (or ‘Muslims’), the term given to the ‘walking dead’ of the concentration camps, who due to the infliction of continued violence — malnutrition, sleep deprivation, extended work, and torture — are reduced to a state of fragile indifference to their immediate conditions (Agamben, 1999). The insensibility of these figures to the world, and their disjunction from the social interactions of the prisoners and guards around, is also the process by which the *Muselmänner* are apprehended as living beings who have in some way lost their humanity, their ability to interact and engage with their surroundings, their ability to *speak*. Agamben states that the “*Muselmänn* is not only or not so much a limit between life and death; rather, he marks the threshold between the human and the inhuman” (Agamben, 1999: 55).

Agamben argues that the *Muselmänn* is the human reduced to the point at which it is indistinguishable from the animal and is therefore rendered speechless. Homer, on the other hand, provides a vision of the human torn from its animal materiality, which also happens to produce speechlessness. The message through both accounts is that the human capacity for rational speech – that trait that is so loved by philosophers and scientists as the mark *par excellence* of humanity’s difference from the animal – resides in the space between the human and the animal, a trait that does not survive the extinguishment of the human within the animal, nor the animal within the human. The bind of the human is that even when it demonstrates that characteristic which highlights its distinction from other animals, it is reliant upon its animality for its expression. We find an echo of this same uneasy differentiation between the human

and animal today when we consider something like the human genome project, which at once sets out to source the essence of the human, yet resorts to locating the essence of the human through its biological classification: the animal inside. As much as we may desire for the human to sail from the shore of its own animality, its most urgent political task brings it crashing back to the animal within, always caught in the breakers.

Plato and the Philosophical Dog

This eternal return to the shore of animality also belongs to Plato's contemplation of the perfect political state in his *Republic*. It is fair to say that the *Republic* lends itself well to analysis as a primary source for thinking about the relationship of biopower to the politics in the Western tradition because of the importance Plato placed upon seeking to align the marcopolitical system to the 'souls' of the citizens within it. Justice, in Plato's conception, is about providing people what they are owed, but not merely in the sense of debt or surplus. Plato viewed justice as ensuring that political outcomes aligned as closely as possible with the natures inherent to political subjects. "When god fashioned you, he added gold in the composition of those of you who are qualified to be Rulers...he put silver in the Auxiliaries, and iron and bronze in the farmers and other workers" (Plato, 2003: 116 [Part IV, Book III, 415a-b]). Thus the true nature of the individual – what they have been given as a preformed biological entity – provides the balance sheet to what is owed to them, and their place within a political system.

Assuming this focus by Plato on essence, there are similarly abiding connections drawn between human and non human animal life throughout *The Republic*. As per the opening quote in this paper, Plato's use of animals within the text may often highlight the odd positioning of the animal on the teasing periphery of the civil political space. Perhaps one of the most persistent examples within the book is the comparison of the Guardian class – those charged with securing the Republic – with watch dogs. On the face of it, this comparison is merely intended to illustrate the role of the Guardians in providing the armed security, both inside and outside the Republic. Yet beyond a mere passing comparison, there is a seemingly genuine and primal connection here that Plato leans on. This is illustrated in the second fragment I wish to examine, a fragment that might be called, "the philosophical dog."

In this section of *The Republic*, Socrates notes that the Guardian class will be required to both maintain ruthlessness with respect to their enemies, yet also a kind benevolence towards those who are in their charge – namely the citizens of the republic. This governing task appears to require the Guardians to reconcile two apparently unconnected – even opposed – characteristics, namely the power of violence towards enemies and the power of care towards friends. Searching for an answer to this apparently contradictory nature, Socrates, in conversation with Glaucon, turns to examine more closely his example of a watch dog:

[Socrates] "I felt myself in difficulty, but I thought over what we had just been saying, and then exclaimed: 'You know, we really deserve to be in difficulty. For we have failed to press our analogy far enough.'

[Glaucon] 'In what way?'

‘We have not noticed that there are natures which combine the qualities we thought incompatible.’
‘And where are they to be found?’
‘In different kinds of animal, but particularly in the watch dog to which we have compared our Guardian. For you must have noticed that it is a natural characteristic of a well bred dog to behave with the utmost gentleness to those it is used to and knows, but to be savage to strangers?’
‘Yes, I’ve noticed that.’
‘The kind of character we are looking for in our Guardian is therefore quite a possibility and not at all unnatural.’
‘So it appears.’
‘Would you agree then that our prospective Guardian needs, in addition to his high spirits, the disposition of a philosopher?’
‘I don’t understand what you mean,’ he said.
‘You will find it in the dog, and a remarkable quality it is.’
‘What sort of quality?’
‘It is annoyed when it sees a stranger, even though he has done it no harm; but it welcomes anyone it knows, even though it has never had any kindness from him. Haven’t you ever thought how remarkable this is?’
‘I can’t say I ever thought about it before,’ he replied. ‘But of course it’s what a dog does.’
‘And yet it is a trait that shows discrimination and a truly philosophic nature,’ I said.
‘How so?’
‘Because,’ I replied, ‘the dog distinguishes the sight of friend and foe simply by knowing one and not knowing the other. And a creature that distinguishes between the familiar and the unfamiliar on the grounds of knowledge or ignorance must surely be gifted with a real love of knowledge.’
‘There is no denying it,’ he said.
‘But is not philosophy the same thing as the love of knowledge?’ⁱⁱ
(Plato, 2003: 65 [Part II, Book II, 375d-376b])

As Socrates is attempting to illustrate that essential quality that belongs most intimately to the Guardians, simultaneously he chooses to associate this elite of humanity with the dog. He points to an association between not merely the ability to measure violence and love appropriately in the face of either one’s friends or enemies, but further names this trait as distinctly philosophical, both in human and dog, despite the fact that philosophy, of all things, has almost always treated itself as that most essential human characteristic.

I should emphasise that this relationship is not metaphorical: the dog is not a linguistic stand in for the human. The dog is rather an example that illustrates in a biological sense what might be possible for humans. That is, the reasoning suggests that if humans and dogs are both animals, and a dog might possess the philosophical trait of differentiating between friend and enemy, then it is likely that humans may also share this trait. Thus, extrapolating on this reasoning, the human quality can be found in

nature, and thus, the characteristics sought in the Guardian are not artificial but reside within the terms of the biological body, within the animality of the human.

Once again then, just as in the fragment from Homer above, we see an odd intertwining between human and animal life, in the fact that Plato describes what is definitive to the perfected human by recourse to the animal. The imperative displayed is to distil the essential nature of the human; the product is a state that returns to the animal. It is the animal that provides the proof that they sought after.

Aristotle and the “Political Animal”

It is appropriate at this point to turn to Aristotle, who I believe provides the most refined understanding of this relationship between human and animal life, and the essential relationship between the human and animal organisms, even when it is the human specifically, rather than the animal *per se*, that is at issue.

It would not be unfair to say that Aristotle is almost perversely interested in animals and their relationship to the human. Aristotle, after all, contributed a five volume biological treatise on animal life – namely *History of Animals*, *On the Parts of Animals*, *On the Motion of Animals*, *On the Gait of Animals* and *On the Generation of Animals* – which offers detailed examinations on the anatomy, movement and reproduction of animal life. Importantly within these works, human life was not treated separately, but regarded as one of the many species under Aristotle’s magnifying glass, and thus there is an implicit understanding of the interconnection between human and animal life. Aristotle’s aim here is to situate the human within the field of animal life, by providing a sense as to what human life shares, and does not share, with other animals.

But it is not merely in Aristotle’s biological studies that we find a connection drawn between human and animal, but, it would seem, at various important threshold points within the body of Aristotle’s work. Consider Aristotle’s volume on *Logic*. Here on page after page, indeed from the first page of the first book, the example of the distinction and non-distinction between animal and human life is used to illustrate the nature of logical argument. For example, in Book1, Chapter 2 of “Prior Analytics,” Aristotle proclaims:

... if some B is A, then some of the As must be B. For if none were, then no B would be A. But if some B is not A, there is no necessity that some of the As should not be B; eg let B stand for animal and A for man. Not every animal is a man; but every man is an animal. (Aristotle, 1952a: 40 [25a])

This distinction, that the human belongs to animals, but not all animals are human, is of course pivotal to Aristotle’s definition of the human, and that special quality that is inherent to the human yet not intrinsic to other animals. Indeed we note that in the citation above, this particular relationship is not merely “in theory” but elevated to a matter of logic: “Not every animal is a man; but every man is an animal.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This is the ‘logic’ that grounds Aristotle’s proclamation on the relationship between humans, animals and politics, a fragment I will quote here at length:

...it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without state, is either a bad man or above humanity; he is like the

Tribeless, lawless, heartless one,

Whom Homer denounces – the natural outcast-- is forthwith a lover of war; he may be compared to an isolated piece at draughts.

Now that man is more of a political animal than bees or other gregarious animals is evident. Nature, as we say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal who she has endowed with the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and unjust. And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state. (Aristotle 1952c: 446 [1253a])

Here Aristotle makes a decisive pronouncement that captures the logic of biopolitics, its necessary connection to politics in the West, and the extent and limits of its jurisdiction.

Firstly, the logical distinction outlined above (“Not every animal is a man; but every man is an animal”) is founded through a differentiation in relation to the human propensity for political community that apparently exceeds other comparable species (certainly, more clearly than “bees or other gregarious animals”). Yet note here that although “man” possesses a quality that is not shared by other animals, the structure of this same logic dictates that “man” remains at base an animal. The human is both beyond the animal, yet absolutely captured by the animal: the human is an entity that extends beyond what it is, yet at the same time is what it is.

Secondly, Aristotle describes the graduated scheme by which human animals may be distributed across varying positions along the long trajectory between the animal and the idealised human subject. This entity, “the bad man” or the one “above humanity,” is unable to perfect “his” nature: “For man, when perfected, is the best of the animals, but when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all... he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the most full of lust and gluttony” (Aristotle, 1952c: 446 [1253a]). This particular bond between the human who has lost its relation to justice and non human animal life is all too apparent in Aristotle’s discussion of

slavery, where the slave is understood as the human who is closer to the animals, as the human animal who has not developed that quality that marks it as a more perfect animal:

When there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals...the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master...indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life. (Aristotle, 1952c: 448 [1254b]).

Once again, we find the inescapability of the animal essence within the definition of the human essence: the slave is the human animal who has failed to demonstrate that he is human, and thus is at base, a mere animal.

It is here that I wish to reinforce the importance of the soul through Aristotle's understanding of politics, an importance that is arguably illustrative of the political sphere in the classical tradition, and its peculiar relationship to animal life. It is within this tradition that discussions on the nature of the soul are necessarily wed to the understanding of how the political sphere is constructed. This lies behind so much of the reasoning within Plato's *Republic*, for example, in so far as the alleged beauty of the political system Plato proposes, is the sense of justice it offers in aligning the political sphere to the souls of its citizens. Yet where Aristotle differs significantly from Plato and other thinkers is his resolute understanding of the connection between the human soul and the animal soul. Indeed in his work entitled *On the Soul (De Anima)*, he explicitly draws a point of difference between his own work and that of previous thinkers by accusing these philosophers of erroneously only concerning themselves with investigating the "human soul" rather than the souls of animals in the first instance (Aristotle, 1952b: 631 [402b]).

According to Aristotle, the soul is not an essence or spirit that is distinct from, and may survive the extinguishment of, the biological body. Instead, the soul is presented as the living presence of the biological organism: in Aristotle's words "the soul is the cause or source of the living body" (1952b: 645 [415b]). Aristotle states that there are three properties that may belong to a fully formed soul: thinking; perception; and generation / nutrition (Ibid [414b]). It is the latter property that refers to the minimal condition of functioning for any biological organism and acts as its baseline principle for living in its barest sense.

It is possible here to see the connection that is drawn between human and animal life, and the importance of the animal soul as a baseline for the human soul. The human must be thought of firstly as an ensouled body: in Aristotle's words "the soul plus the body constitutes the animal" (Aristotle, 1952b: 643 [413a]). And thus the human is not the only organism owed a soul – rather the human is an animal with a soul with properties that may extend beyond the merely living animal. Although humans are granted a thinking faculty beyond other animals, the human is still at base an animal, and, as Aristotle's discussion of slaves demonstrates, some humans may never be accorded a "fully formed soul", and thus always be closer to the animal.

I acknowledge that today the soul is not a particularly fashionable point of contemplation, either for philosophy or political theory. Yet I think it is crucial to rethink the soul, and acknowledge its curious absence – at least on the surface - from thinking about the nature of the political subject. Foucault makes an important observation in *Discipline and Punish*, that modern punishment affected a shift of focus from “the body to the soul”. To my mind this particular observation by Foucault has not been adequately appraised for what it is: namely an opportunity to rethink the soul within the contemporary political context. For we only need to turn to Agamben’s work on bare life – the political subject caught within the sphere of exception of biopolitical sovereignty – to understand the trajectory that links classical thought on the soul to the modern political predicament of the human. For Agamben’s bare life carries an uncanny resemblance to Aristotle’s animal soul – a life stripped of all relationality, with the exception of its nutritive and reproductive capacities, that is its core biological functioning. And of course, this same figure illustrates in an exact way, how it is that power had shifted in focus from the body to the soul – as explained by Foucault – even if the body should remain the continuing focus of violent attentions – incarceration, rape and torture. The shift Foucault refers to from body to soul is not about the change in the instruments of punishment (although this may be entailed) but reflects a refinement in the ability to capture biological life as the first port of call.

The non-human animal continues to inform this focus, since contemporary biopolitics holds the power to always reduce the human to the animal – this is the principle of functioning that is accorded to sovereign exception. Where the other components of the soul — perception and intellect — are not accorded by we humans to all living things, it is the capacity to reproduce and to nourish which is held central to each biological organism, human, animal or plant. Yet, we may observe by a curious reversal how any biological organism, no matter how cultivated or advanced their soul, retains the ability to be reduced to a bare state of functioning. Biopolitics holds this particular passage of transformation in its hands.

Conclusion

Readers of *The Republic* will know that Plato paints a picture of democracy as social organization quite literally “gone to the dogs”:

You would never believe it – unless you have seen it for yourself – how much more liberty the domestic animals have in democracy. The dog comes to resemble its mistress, as the proverb has it, and the same is true of the horses and donkeys as well. They are in the habit of walking about the streets with a grand freedom, and bump into people they meet if they don’t get out of their way. Everything is full of this spirit of liberty. (Plato, 2003: 300 [Part IX, Book VIII, 563c]).

If we are right to assume that the political sphere in the Western tradition is founded upon the exclusion of the animal, then it becomes clearer why the freedom of animals, who are otherwise formally excluded from the political sphere, should be at issue in Socrates’ deliberations on the nature of a political system ostensibly designed for

humans. These apparently humorous deliberations reflect a somewhat deeper concern: an anxiety in relation to the borders between the human and the animal, and their close relationship to the political space. After all, the ‘civility’ of the political space depends upon the absolute exclusion of non human animals from formal participation. This is a primary exclusion that shapes who it is within this space that is granted political agency, and who is by the same process violently alienated from political power. In this sense, moral consideration of species value occurs at the same moment as the political is enacted. As opposed to a liberal political view of power, where moral consideration precedes the construction of the civil political space and shapes the terms of inclusion, we might argue that politics emerges through a primary exclusion that simultaneously declares the moral decision.

If politics, following Agamben, describes the biopolitical struggle between human and animal, then democracy, properly understood, describes the process, successful or otherwise, of admitting the animal into the political sphere. Democracy is the political process of struggle over the terms of moral consideration. If this speculation is accurate, it is then no accident that we should find threshold points that mark the struggle over the definition of the human, or even the ‘fully formed human subject’, which curiously resonate with unresolved democratic struggles over the last two hundred years: for example slaves, women, savages, queers and children.

Democracy is the active process of negotiating admittance; a process that is both massively transformative, but is also at the very same moment immensely dangerous. It is for this reason that I believe that the political challenge before us to think about a radical democratisation, since surely it is true that only an expanded concept of democracy could break the forms of exclusion that are inherent to politics, and thus transform the meaning of politics itself. We might imagine some concrete ways forward in this area. For example, thinking about the way in which political change is possible through readmitting animals within urbanized spaces, as suggested by Jennifer Wolch (1998). Close cohabitation with non-human animal life – beyond the limited involvement of non-human animals as domesticated ‘companion animals’ – and a genuine attempt to negotiate public spaces with non human entities, would affect a change in how we understand the civil political sphere. This means, invariably, tempering human activity with respect to other entities, and actively building inclusive rather than exclusive forms of political engagement. Similarly we could imagine political networks that implicitly include non-human entities, such as described in Bruno Latour’s “Parliament of Things” (1993). If we accept the fact that our political networks invariably intertwine with both non human sentient beings, and non sentient entities, it is possible to re-imagine a political space which formally recognise that political decisions must be made and enacted not merely by human actors, but by all constituent entities.

Yet I note that we encounter here the constitutive problem that faces democracy in this project of admitting the animal: namely the fact that the civil political space is based on the exclusion of the animal, and thus, democracy must work, whether through rights or through welfare, by inducting newly formed humans rather than admitting animals *per se*. This democratic and expansive process of induction, which is revolutionary in so far as it promises to stretch the borders of the human, also is contemptibly conservative, in that it resolutely maintains the constitutive status quo: namely, that the political sphere is founded on the continual and violent exclusion of

the animal. If biopolitics and Western politics are the same, then we will continue to have more of the same. Namely a political sphere that by definition operates through continuing economy of souls--a primal form of segregation, inherent to the human/animal machine. And the machine will continue to produce violent effects – incarceration, torture, death – for those who fall outside the sphere of humanity, whether they are anatomically “human” or “animal.”

In other words, and this is the message that weaves its way through the fragments in this paper, the fates of both the human and animal are intertwined through the construction of the political sphere, in body, in voice, in democracy. The human belongs to the political in so far as it can divorce itself from the animal, and the animal is understood, conversely, as that entity that is constituted at the moment of its exclusion. I end therefore with a question: How do we unthink this process and bring the animal (both that which is within us and the non-human varieties that inhabit the Earth with us) into the sphere of politics?

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ⁱ Noting this, I also take this opportunity to acknowledge that there are many grey areas within the literature I will cite, with the usual translation difficulties that arise in comprehending any ancient text in today's context, and with this an allied problematic in relation to the comparability of terminology. An example of this is the term 'human' that has a distinct contemporary meaning that does not necessarily translate to the ancient world. Contemporary theorists such as Agamben elide this issue through the use of the gendered term "man" – in Agamben's case "man" is used as the intermediary between the human and the animal – but I have my own concerns with using this approach, namely a desire to not efface the historical situation of "woman" within the human / animal distinction, which has never assumed the same trajectory as that of "man."

ⁱⁱ Note here that the last line is a play on words – which does not translate to English, but conveys a relation between a dog's love for its human masters and the human love of knowledge that is given the name "philosophy."

ⁱⁱⁱ It should also not escape our attention that a similar logical relationship lies behind the "philosophical dog" fragment I have cited above from Plato.